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Raketu review

Tuesday, November 07, 2006

I've been using **Raketu** for a few weeks prior to this review. This newcomer to the VoIP arena made its debut on September 12, 2006, and it shows definite promise. Their goal is to do no less than to overtake Skype as the leader in Internet voice communications, with the following strategy:

1. Offer more features than anyone else. Never have I seen this many features wrapped up into an IM client:

- SIP compatible
- Voicemail
- Conference calling
- Subscribe to news, stocks, weather, podcasts and other RSS feeds
- Integrated media player with karaoke mode
- Picture viewer
- Integrated travel planner, using Yahoo's Farechase for cheap flight results
- Send free SMS text messages to mobile phones
- Download game plug-ins to play with others online

2. Offer free calls to landlines in 42 countries until the end of 2006. I've been told that Raketu may add more countries to **this list** as we approach December, and they are also considering an extension of the promotion into 2007. However, I have found that in order to make free calls, you must have at least \$0.01 of credit on your Raketu account. You can sign up for the **free trial**, which will put \$0.01 into your account for 1 hour, but it will revert back to \$0.00 after 1 hour whether or not you have been using the service for the entire time.

3. Offer interoperability with other IM clients. The Multi-Messenger lets you exchange text messages with your contacts from any of the following accounts into a single interface:

- AOL Instant Messenger
- ICQ
- MSN Messenger
- Google Talk
- Yahoo Messenger
- Skype (*Skype is not integrated into Raketu the way the other clients are. In order to communicate with Skype contacts from Raketu, a Skype client must be installed and running on your PC.)

4. Offer a less controversial VoIP service by not creating Supernodes. With this approach, Raketu avoids a security issue that plagues Skype while still claiming to have high completion rates and excellent voice quality.

Raketu is banking on these four offers to propel them to internet telephony fame. They also want to launch RakIn and RadioShow services in the near future. Everything (except the battleships game plug-in) comes in an installer

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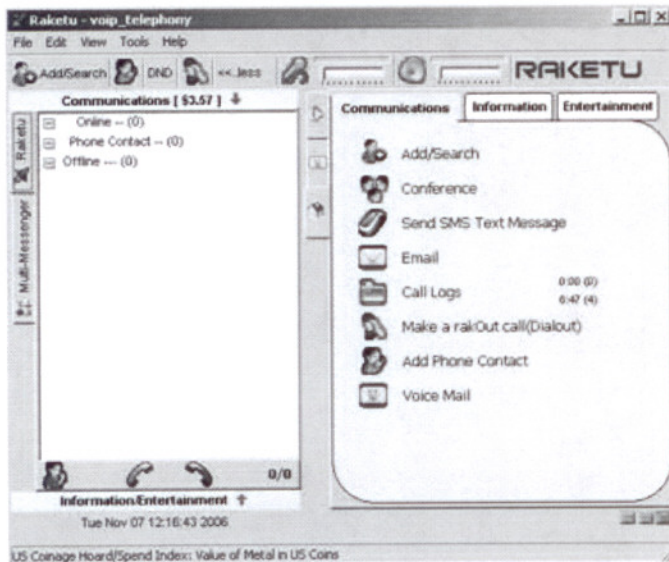
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package of only 3.4 MB. So far, everything looks good. We'll have to wait and find out if Raketu will be successful in becoming a Skype-killer.

Interface

If Raketu wants to attract more users, they'll have to make some major changes to the usability and appearance of both the website and the application. I navigated through all the pages in the website and all the windows in the application, but the process just wasn't intuitive. However, once you know where everything is, you'll find that nothing is more than one or two clicks away. And in an e-mail exchange, their tech support team mentioned that the website will be re-developed with user friendliness in mind. With that aside, the Help menu offers informative guides and movie tutorials that every beginner should be sure to check out.



Voice quality

Now we arrive at the make-or-break issue. Does it sound alright? Can I understand the person I'm talking to? And you'll be glad to know that the clarity is fine. Though it's not like a local call on a standard phone, the quality is on par with Skype and cell phones, with little to no noticeable echo or static.

Raketu advertises that it only needs a connection speed of 36 kbps to make calls, as long as the user isn't downloading any files at the same time. For those of you on WiFi connections, they also claim that Raketu works even when your signal strength is as low as 15%. I haven't tested Raketu on dial-up, but when I was making calls at a WiFi hotspot (with a good signal), I found that the voice "stuttered" a little bit. This would happen for a few minutes then clear up. Of course this depends on your WiFi connection, but for best results stick with wired broadband.

Bug Report

Nowhere on Raketu's website or in the program does it mention that this program is in BETA testing. The current version is 1.0 but they still have a built-in mechanism for reporting bugs. Rather than using that form, I'm going to just list my finds here. I'm sure the Raketu team will be fixing them in an upcoming release.

- Stocks often say [Quote not available]
- Weather feeds work only on occasion

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- Newsreader doesn't format combined Blogger/Feedburner feeds well, though this problem may be caused by either Blogger or Feedburner because most feeds are fine
- The media player has unhelpful error messages when required codecs are missing
- The multi-messenger occasionally crashes upon closing

To wrap-up, Raketu is a product you'll want to look out for in the future. Once they've dealt with their usability issues and fixed some bugs, their rich feature set may give them the advantage over Skype and other competitors. The functionality is all there, now it just needs to be optimized for the masses.

Pros: Good voice quality, free calling promotion, no supernodes, compatibility with SIP and IM clients, free SMS, many features, guides, tips, and tricks

Cons: User friendliness, appearance, must buy credits to make free calls, lingering bugs

Overall: 4 stars (out of 5)

Have you had an experience with Raketu that you'd like to share? Leave a comment or e-mail me at [voip_telephony \[at\] yahoo \[dot\] com](mailto:voip_telephony[at]yahoo[dot]com) and I'll publish your review or directly link to the review on your website.

Categories: Raketu, Review, VoIP, Skype, Long-Distance, VoIP Provider, SIP, AIM, ICQ, MSN, GTalk, YIM, Mobile Phone, WiFi, VoIP Service

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